

Ruiz juror let go after telling court 'I don't care'

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SPOKANE -- A prospective juror in the Vicente Ruiz murder trial told the court Friday that she wouldn't bother listening to evidence in the 23-year-old case because people "need to do the time if they committed the crime."

"I just don't care. I'm a strong believer -- on the criminals, the idiots out on the streets -- they can do the time," the woman said in a very matter-of-fact way. "I don't care what happens to them. They can rot in jail for all I care."

The woman had been called in to talk with the judge after she'd shared similar sentiments in a note earlier this week.

Superior Court Judge Cameron Mitchell told the juror that Ruiz is only accused, not convicted, in the 1987 slayings at a Pasco body shop. He asked if that would make a difference in her thinking.

It didn't.

"I just don't care what goes on in a courtroom. I don't care," she continued.

Mitchell paused a few times and said, "Uh, OK," each time before following up with another question to see if there was any way the juror could be objective in the trial.

Asked if she would care if she was in Ruiz's position, the woman said, "No. I just wouldn't commit a crime."

And if it were her son or daughter accused of a crime, she said they would need to be locked up.

Both prosecutors and defense attorneys quickly agreed the woman could be excused from the jury panel. An additional 14 people were dismissed Friday.

Ruiz, 46, is charged in Franklin County Superior Court with five counts of aggravated first-degree murder and one count of attempted first-degree murder.

This is his third trial after the first two ended in mistrials. It was moved to Spokane County because of publicity in recent years about the case.

Prosecutors allege he was one of two people who opened fire on a group of men inside Medina's Body Shop. The lone survivor told police that Ruiz was one of the shooters.

Killed were: Misael Barajas, 22; Juan Antonio Lopez Garcia, 20; Eliceo Guzman Lamas, 20; and Rafael Parra Magallon, 22, all of Pasco, and Francisco Venegas Cortez, 21, of Kennewick.

Ruiz's cousin, Pedro Mendez-Reyna, is serving a life sentence for his role in the shootings. He also pointed the finger at his cousin as a part of his plea agreement.

However, Ruiz always has maintained his innocence and claims it might have been another person, like his brother, who is said to be nearly identical in appearance. He has been in custody since he was extradited to Pasco in 2007.

Jury selection started Tuesday and is expected to last into next Tuesday.

Already, 22 of the initial 114 who responded on the first day were excused because of conflicts with their work or personal lives. The judge and attorneys are spending a couple of days talking to individual jurors about answers on their questionnaires.

A few jurors Friday said that they remember hearing about the murders back in 1987 through the Spokane media but have forgotten the details and not paid attention since then.

One woman said it was shocking to learn of the killing of five people in the 1980s, but "nowadays it's just old hat. I believe there are too many guns on the streets, too many senseless killings over drugs."

She was excused.

A professional truck driver said that earlier this year while going to Pasco on his three-times-a-week route, he heard reports about the crime on a local radio station. He said he understood that the investigation was done, and they were rounding up people for a trial but didn't know it was about the actual trial until defense attorney Kevin Holt mistakenly revealed that this isn't Ruiz's first time before a jury.

The man was surprised to hear Ruiz had gone to trial in Franklin County and, though he couldn't remember anything from the stories, was excused from the jury pool.

The court also let go a woman who said she was surprised she even made it this far in the process because she is married to a police officer.

"I would love to do it, but I can't see anybody wanting me on a jury," she said.

The trial is expected to last through December.

Read more: <http://www.tri-cityherald.com/2010/11/13/1250649/ruiz-juror-let-go-after-telling.html#ixzz15NIFKE1z>